

VZCZCXRO7561  
RR RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN  
DE RUEH SA #0644/01 0881556  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 281556Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3963  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE  
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 5457  
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 9685  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRETORIA 000644

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SF](#)  
SUBJECT: XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS ON RISE

PRETORIA 00000644 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Over the past month, South Africa has experienced a spate of violent attacks against foreigners, especially Zimbabweans living in informal settlements just outside the capitol city of Pretoria. Xenophobia is not new to South Africa, but has been growing over the past couple of years, with many South Africans mistakenly believing that foreigners are increasingly responsible for the high levels of crime and unemployment among South Africans. International organizations believe the problem is likely to get worse before it gets better and that the SAG and civil society need to act now to quell further violence. The SAG has taken notice, but appears to be taken off-guard and floundering in its response. END SUMMARY.

-----  
XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE INTENSIFIES NEAR CAPITOL  
-----

¶2. (U) Over the past month, South Africa has experienced a spate of particularly violent xenophobic attacks just outside the capitol. Foreigners have been forced to flee informal settlements in Phomolong, Jeffsville, Brazzaville, Atteridgeville, Soshanguve, Mooiplaas, Itireleng, and Siyahlala, where gangs of men armed with paraffin and petrol bombs have been targeting them. According to Darshan Vigneswaran, Wits University's forced migration study programme coordinator, these are not isolated incidents, but a national wave of xenophobic violence sweeping the country.

¶3. (C) Most of the violence has been directed at foreigners' homes and businesses. In February, nearly 300 foreigners were forced to flee when South African squatters from Itireleng informal settlement attacked them, torching homes, a church, and belongings in the process. Most recently, on 24 March, two Zimbabweans and two South Africans (who police believe were mistaken as foreigners) were viciously murdered in Brazzaville, an informal settlement just outside Pretoria. Press reports note that one Zimbabwean was dragged out of his house, beaten to death, and then thrown into his own burning house. PolAsst, who lives in the area, said the other Zimbabwean was padlocked in his house, which was then set on fire.

¶4. (C) Abel Mbiyini, UNHCR's Deputy Representative in South Africa told PolOffs he accompanied the Minister of Home Affairs to the site the day after and saw "Rwanda in 1994: the burnt bodies hadn't even been removed." He also said that he briefed a parliamentary committee (NFI) on 26 March

and told them that the events in Brazzaville "were not only regrettable, but shameful." (COMMENT: Mbiyini comments surprised PolOff since he has a reputation for usually being overly optimistic or apologetic for the SAG. END COMMENT) He has urged the SAG to remind South Africans that many of them were in the same situation in exile only 15 years ago, to order the South African Human Rights Commission to conduct an inquiry, and encourage South African NGOs like the Islamic Relief to come forward and speak out against xenophobia.

-----  
SAG RESPONSE DISAPPOINTING  
-----

15. (C) Hans-Petter Boe, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Regional Representative for Southern Africa, told PolOffs on 27 March that the problem is only going to get worse with the constant influx of immigrants and the South African media's tendency to overstate and sensationalize crimes committed by foreigners. Boe said the recent spate of attacks has finally attracted the attention of high-level government officials, adding that he has received calls this week from both Minister of Home Affairs Mapisa-Nqakula and Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad looking for help and advice. Another Ministry of Home Affairs official called IOM earlier that morning looking for emergency supplies for the temporary refugee center at Matseke Primary School in Atteridgeville. Boe seemed somewhat exasperated by this, saying they cannot do everything. (NOTE: According to Mbiyini, the Ministry of Home Affairs has to find a new shelter for these families by 31 March when school starts up again after Easter break. END NOTE)

16. (C) The Minister of Home Affairs has strongly condemned the attacks, warned that such behavior will not be tolerated,

PRETORIA 00000644 002.2 OF 003

and called an indaba (townhall meeting) where government, civil society, and religious leaders can come up with a solution. However, she also has made excuses, calling South Africa "a victim of its own success, attracting immigrants from across the continent." COSATU also has publicly condemned the attacks, but is laying blame on the former apartheid regime for destroying the economic infrastructure of neighboring countries. Tshwane Executive Mayor Gwen Ramokgopa also has gone out to Brazzaville to urge people to be calm, but according to PolAsst, only the victims are showing up to hear her speak. Local councillors have yet to call any type of town hall meeting to discuss the events. Perhaps most disappointing has been Home Affairs Director General Mavuso Msimang's statement on 27 March that it is not the responsibility of the Department of Home Affairs to protect foreigners. Those stranded at the elementary school in Atteridgeville were told today that South Africa will help them go back to their home country or relocate them, but that they cannot go back to their homes in the informal settlements since the SAG will not be able to guarantee their security.

-----  
ROOTS OF XENOPHOBIA  
-----

17. (C) Boe believes the problem is only going to intensify with the constant influx of immigrants and the South African media's tendency to overstate and sensationalize crimes committed by foreigners. Duncan Breen, advocacy officer for Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa, said publicly, "there is competition for (employment) and the perception that all foreigners commit crime. If the government does not act now, the attacks will continue. There have been warning signs where members of the community have distributed pamphlets telling people that foreigners are bad. That was when we needed to act," he said. UNHCR also

confirmed to PolOffs that foreigners in Shoshanguve are receiving threatening letters ordering them to quit their jobs. South Africa's Institute on Race Relations deputy chief executive Frans Cronje also said publicly that in addition to the perception that foreigners are taking jobs, many believe foreigners are now "taking" South African women as girlfriends. PolAsst reminded PolOff that this attitude is not new, recalling that it was not acceptable for women to date anyone from another township not that long ago; "she belonged to the township," he said.

-----  
FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH  
-----

18. (C) PolAsst visited the affected areas outside Pretoria on 28 March and spoke to local councillors, policemen, and residents from the area. As of the night of 27 March, violence was ongoing, with at least one additional house burnt and six more houses of foreigners' looted. The xenophobic motive remains, he said, but the perpetrators have changed faces. He explained that the violence was initially instigated by South Africans who cite crime and jealousy as motives, but added resentment that foreigners are willing to work for less or sell things (soda, brooms, soap, etc) out of their houses in the informal settlement -- which are most likely frequented by South Africans as well since most informal settlements are mixed -- for less than people would pay in a shop in town owned by a South African who probably lives in a township. Over the past two days, however, the tsotsis (thugs), not the better off South Africans, are

SIPDIS

Qtsotsis (thugs), not the better off South Africans, are targeting foreigners they know have valuables out of their homes and then stealing everything. One policemen told PolAsst that the thieves are actually walking away with TVs and refrigerators, which they will probably sell later. Thus far, 23 people have been arrested, though the police said most of them are tsotsis.

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

19. (C) Xenophobia is not new to South Africa, and has been a growing trend over the past several years, which the SAG and ANC have largely ignored until now. Though Zimbabweans were mostly targeted this week, other immigrants, especially Somalis, Mozambicans, and Nigerians are also frequently victims. As is the case in many countries, this fear and hatred of foreigners appears based more on perception and propaganda than reality, especially since foreigners are not

PRETORIA 00000644 003.2 OF 003

responsible for the majority of crimes committed in this country. Moreover, disenchanted South Africans are blaming those who are most likely in their same predicament and are not responsible for the country's high unemployment rates and poor service delivery.

TEITELBAUM